



Building Communities: Together

Rural Application Guide



“For the past 5 years, we have worked to bring the spark of private enterprise to inner city and poor rural areas—with community development banks, more commercial loans in the poor neighborhoods, cleanup of polluted sites for development. Under the continued leadership of the Vice President, we propose to triple the number of Empowerment Zones, to give business incentives to invest in those areas.”

—President Bill Clinton
State of the Union, January 20, 1998

“Our empowerment agenda is built on the belief that everyone has a positive contribution to make, and that all communities can create the climate that calls forth that contribution . . . if we give them the tools they need.”

—Vice President Al Gore





“This program works. I’ve seen it put people back to work, create safer neighborhoods and schools, house families, and energize rural Americans. President Clinton and Vice President Gore have made Round II of the Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community Initiative an Administration priority. I hope you and your community will join us in these exciting efforts.”

—*Dan Glickman*
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture

“The central challenge being undertaken by the EZ/EC program is to provide needed assistance to communities in their efforts to rebuild community capacity and revitalize economic growth. While this “bottom up” approach will not eradicate poverty overnight, it is breaking the cycle of poverty and empowering rural residents to take responsibility for creating opportunity and a renewed hope for their children’s future.”

—*Jill Long Thompson*
Under Secretary for Rural Development
U.S. Department of Agriculture



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THE VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON

By the end of 1998, 20 new EZs — 15 urban and five rural — will be designated in communities across the country. The Second Round incorporates several new innovative ideas and builds on the success of, and lessons learned from, the First Round.

Most importantly, we learned from the First Round the significance of the application process itself, which required communities to develop their own broad-based plans for revitalization. This resulted in more than 500 communities leveraging billions of dollars in new private-sector investment and forging remarkable public-private partnerships. The Wall Street Journal hailed this process as "one of the few concrete examples of how government can instigate change without directly spending a dime."

I want to ensure that, as in the First Round, the application process provides a lasting benefit for all communities competing. So we are again requiring applicants to develop their own strategic plans for change — and to think even more broadly — when doing so. We have learned from the current EZ/ECs, in fact, that communities that are able to link their revitalization efforts to broader regional strategies can enhance those efforts.

Thus, in the Second Round, communities can designate up to 2,000 acres of additional property outside the formal poverty criterion to be included as part of their Zone. This property would receive all the Zone tax incentives and benefits, including the new Brownfields tax incentive to encourage the clean-up and redevelopment of former industrial property. And, we are asking that applicants incorporate metropolitan and regional strategies and potential ways to leverage this additional property — and the Federal tools available — into their plans.

Communities can also incorporate into their plans several promising new ways to take advantage of advances in information technology. New technologies, such as multi-jurisdictional databases and linked communication systems, can be used to enhance the development of your application and to broaden the participation of residents and organizations in the process. This can be used to tie together and enhance various efforts you are undertaking. For instance, technology can expand opportunities for economic development by helping to connect residents and entrepreneurs to the proliferating area of Web-based commerce and to the growing number of technology-based jobs now becoming available.

You can be sure that all of the Federal Agencies that make up the President's Community Empowerment Board (CEB), which I chair, stand ready to assist you in the planning of your application — and in the implementation of that plan. The Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Agriculture in particular will make available to you several other more detailed publications about the EZ initiative and the Second Round. *See the Resources section at the end of this guide for a complete list of these publications and how to obtain them.* We also will be holding a series of workshops in various locations across the country in the coming months.

We on the CEB are prepared to work with you in developing and carrying through your innovative plans for change. Together, we can show the nation that change is possible.

MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT BOARD

Chair, Vice President Al Gore

Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, Designating Secretary for Rural Areas

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Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community
Service Harris Wofford

Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality Kathleen McGinty



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This *Rural Application Guide* is one of the publications USDA designed to assist your community in developing an application for Round II EZ designation. Applicants are encouraged to read all of the publications in preparation for applying for Round II designation. This *Guide* contains useful information related to the various steps a community should take throughout the application process.

The *Rural Application Guide* provides an overall framework for applying for Round II EZ designation. It provides an overview of the four key principles of the EZ/EC Initiative—strategic vision for change, community-based partnerships, economic opportunity, and sustained community development—and identifies the steps a community should take to complete its application, and how USDA will evaluate those applications. You can find criteria for selection in the *Notice Inviting Applications* for rural applicants.



KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE EZ/EC INITIATIVE

The EZ/EC Initiative is designed to afford communities real opportunities for growth and revitalization. The framework for the Initiative is embodied in four key principles: *strategic vision for change, community-based partnerships, economic opportunity, and sustainable community development*. These principles should be used as a guide as you prepare your EZ application and Strategic Plan. They are drawn from the many approaches communities across this Nation have utilized to successfully develop comprehensive approaches to community revitalization. In this section we introduce these principles and provide examples of projects from Round I of the EZ/EC designations that illustrate the principles in action.

STRATEGIC VISION FOR CHANGE

The strategic vision for change defines a community's aspirations and speaks on the values used to create its vision. The strategic vision identifies realistic goals and includes a solid strategy to achieve those goals. The vision should also lead to a performance measurement or benchmarking system for measuring progress and evaluating and adjusting the Strategic Plan.

Your community is a roadmap for your community's future *vision for change*. For example, you may envision your community as a center for emerging technologies, an incubator for innovative methods of using information technology in partnership with a nearby university or community college. You may envision your community as a key export center for certain farm products or customized manufacturing goods; a healthcare center; or a vibrant residential area focused on an active school, retail markets, recreation, and entertainment.

A vision for change is not a laundry list of your community's shortcomings or problems. Instead it is a strategy for revitalization. It builds on your community's assets and coordinates a response to its needs, such as public safety, human and social services, and environmental protection. It takes into account your

community's role in the regional economy, and how information technology can better facilitate the strategic vision.

In pursuing its strategic vision, you create a plan that will:

- State a clear vision and goals for the future.
- Explain how that vision creates economic opportunity, encourages self-sufficiency, and promotes sustainable community development.
- Build on available assets and opportunities and present a coordinated strategy toward using both.
- Set performance standards for measuring progress and a framework for evaluating and making future adjustments to the Strategic Plan.

Development of a strategic vision was particularly useful for residents of designated communities in Round I of the EZ/EC Initiative. Communities used the process to build resident leadership capacity and provide forums and technical assistance for residents to help them understand local strengths and weaknesses.

The Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, EC allocated \$200,000 to create a revolving loan fund for startup and small businesses. Many public and private organizations are collaborating on this project. As a result, the six loans made so far have retained or created 68 jobs in the EC. Five more businesses will be funded by the EC revolving loan program in 1998, retaining and creating even more jobs for the area.

In the rural Kentucky Highlands EZ, 110 residents participated in Leadership Training and Strategic Vision Building workshops for EZ residents. The training, conducted by the Pacific Institute, was targeted at individuals and groups who needed help in taking control of and responsibility for the projects in their community.

The criteria for selection as an Empowerment Zone are outlined in detail in USDA's *Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones*. Some questions you may wish to consider as you prepare your application are listed below.

Strategic Vision for Change—Questions

Goals.

- How will the EZ process help your community decide on practical goals for the economic, physical, environmental, and human services developments of your community?

- Based on your strategic vision, what do you hope your community will become in the next 10 years?
- What are your goals?
- How are these goals prioritized?

Coordinated Strategy.

- How will your community, through its strategic planning process, reach a measure of consensus on how you will realize your vision?
- How will you link economic, human, physical, and community development and other activities so that they will work in mutually reinforcing, synergistic ways to achieve your strategic goals?
- How will you coordinate the implementation of your strategy to be most effective in terms of time, sequence, and approach?

Creativity and Innovation.

- As your community goes through the planning process, what steps can you take to be as innovative and creative as possible?
- Does your vision have the civic spirit necessary to revitalize your community?
- Does it generate the kind of enthusiasm and encourage the kind of involvement that gives residents a stake in revitalizing and preserving their communities?
- How does your community relate to its metropolitan and regional neighbors, such as neighboring cities or States?

Building on Assets.

- Is your vision for revitalization realistic?
- Does it address the needs of the community to take advantage of the community's existing assets?
- When new activities are proposed, how will existing resources be mobilized to support these activities?

Performance Benchmarking and Learning.

- How will you monitor your progress as you implement your Strategic Plan?
- How does your Plan provide for the ongoing process of adjusting, correcting, and building on what does and does not work for your community?
- How will you establish a system for monitoring outputs of your Plan?

- How will you make changes in the Plan due to unforeseen events?

COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERSHIPS

The community-based partnership principle encourages all stakeholders in a community to participate in the revitalization of distressed neighborhoods. Partners include residents; businesses; local political leaders; local, State, and Federal governments; community development corporations; local public health and social services departments; regional planning organizations; unions; environmental groups; schools and universities; faith-based organizations; and other community groups.

Communities that stand together are communities that can rise together. Communities cannot live on public resources alone. The EZ/EC Initiative is grounded in the beliefs that each community knows best how to solve its problems and that its residents, businesses, governments, and nonprofit organizations must all work in partnership to revitalize distressed neighborhoods. The Federal EZ/EC grant funds and tax credits are seed money designed to help mobilize revitalization efforts. The community and its partners must truly work together to achieve sustainable results.

Round I EZ/EC designations facilitated many new examples of community-based partnerships in action.

The Historic Idlewild Project in the Lake County, Michigan, EC is preserving and honoring the town's rich African-American history through the development of an African-American history museum, cultural center, and convention center. None of these projects could have happened without the solid community partnerships the EC built. A partnership between the town and the EC secured donated land for the project. Technical support for the museum and the centers is being provided through a partnership with Cranbrook Academy of Arts in Detroit, and a consultant formerly with the Smithsonian Institution. A statewide utility company, MichCon, has joined the EC to develop marketing and promotional materials targeting business and tourism.

The Northeast Louisiana Delta Community Development Corporation (CDC), in partnership with the Louisiana Technical College,

Tallulah, and the Madison Parish School Board, is providing a nursing assistant training program for high school seniors. Students in the Northeast Louisiana Delta EC earn certified nursing assistant certificates along with their high school diplomas. Classes are held at the CDC's Delta Learning Center for adults.

The Hidden Valley High School STRUT (students recycling used technology) Program in the Josephine County, Oregon, EC is a partnership between Intel Corporation, the State of Oregon, and local businesses, industries, and Federal agencies for refurbishing and upgrading used computer-related equipment. Students receive valuable training, schools obtain the computer equipment they need, and community members are able to use a much-appreciated resource.

Resident participation in planning and decision making is another key component of community-based partnerships. Successful and sustained revitalization starts with residents. Residents must be involved in identifying the strategic vision for change, developing specific goals, and crafting solutions. Residents must also play an active role in implementing and monitoring their plan for revitalization, through governance structures that provide them with a real voice in decision making. Each EZ is responsible for designing its own governance structure, which is typically a board composed of local decision makers chosen from a cross-section of the stakeholders in each community. Boards should not be so large as to be unwieldy in operation, yet they must permit an opportunity for all key stakeholders to participate. During Round I, some communities established nonprofit organizations to implement their Strategic Plans, and they used the nonprofit organization's board of directors as the governance mechanism for the Zones. Others created stand-alone advisory boards to guide local officials during implementation.

Community-Based Partnerships—Questions

Governance.

- How will you establish a governance board that represents your entire community?

- How will you ensure that the board uses a fair and effective decision-making process so that implementation of your plan stays on schedule?

Community Partners.

- Does your process of coalition- and partnership-building encourage community residents to participate in the creation of the Strategic Plan?
- Can community residents determine their role in implementing the Plan?
- Does the Plan, for example, integrate local, educational, social, civic, religious, environmental, and health organizations, reflecting the prominent place that these institutions occupy in your community's daily life?

Private- and Nonprofit-Sector Partners.

- Has your community secured partnership commitments from organizations in the private and nonprofit sectors, such as corporations, utilities, banks and other financial institutions, and educational institutions?

Note on the Role of States

As Round II applicants develop their Strategic Plans and negotiate partnerships to implement those Plans, they may discover important roles for the State to play. States can assist both applicant communities and designated communities in many ways:

- Providing and sharing demographic data, economic data, and other information useful for measuring local needs and developing your Strategic Plan.
- Targeting multiple State resources for specific EZ neighborhoods, such as grants or loans and insurance for affordable housing, transportation, social services, economic development, and recreation.
- Targeting State-administered Federal resources to EZ neighborhoods.
- Coordinating the delivery of these State/discretionary Federal resources for social services, job training, housing, transportation, brownfields redevelopment, and recreation and parks for EZ neighborhoods.
- Assisting with fast-track private activity bonds.
- Expediting Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) pass-through funding.
- Waiving troublesome State regulations that impede implementation of State resources.
- Sharing office space, staff, and technical assistance helpful to the designated EZs as they plan and implement Strategic Plans.
- Playing a key role in implementation of the national welfare-to-work initiative: States can be important partners with you, designing special local welfare-to-work initiatives targeted to the EZ neighborhood as part of your application.

State and Local Government Partners.

- Has your community secured commitments from State and local governments to provide support for the Strategic Plan?
- Have you, for example, ensured that your government partners are committed to coordinating their programs to assist you in the implementation of the plan?
- Have you consulted the mayor's office, city council, and regional and State planning organizations?
- Have you consulted with your local transit authority to make it aware of your proposal and to discuss any transit improvement projects planned for your nominated area?

Permanent Implementation and Evaluation Structure.

- Has your community devised a way to hold partners accountable for their involvement in implementing the Strategic Plan throughout the 10-year period of EZ designation?
- Have all the partners agreed to their commitments? Have such issues as conflicts of interest, competing agendas, and disagreements between partners been adequately addressed?
- Have you provided for ways to resolve future disagreements through consensus-building activities, public forums, and regular meetings of the governance board?

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Economic opportunity includes creating jobs within the community and linking residents to jobs throughout the region; providing entrepreneurs with technical assistance; providing greater access to capital and credit for businesses so they can expand and create job opportunities for residents; and providing residents with access to job-training and job-placement services, including those associated with welfare-to-work and school-to-work initiatives.

The first priority in revitalizing distressed communities is to create economic opportunities—namely, jobs for residents. The creation of jobs, both within the community and throughout the region, provides the foundation on which residents can become economically self-sufficient. Communities should work with local businesses to understand their employment needs and develop programs that match residents with real job opportunities. Applicants should

also develop programs to increase the flow of capital and credit to businesses so they can expand and create new high-wage jobs. Round I programs included small business assistance centers, U.S. Small Business Administration one-stop capital shops, community development banks, microenterprise credit programs, and loan pools.

EZ applicants should show that they understand:

- The existing economic base of the area, including those sectors that will most likely provide job opportunities for residents.
- The credit and capital needs of local businesses and the types of labor skills they need.
- The skill levels of area residents and the programs needed to upgrade those job skills.
- Employment barriers such as the need for childcare, inadequate or unavailable transportation, the need for drug-treatment centers, and how to overcome such barriers.
- Changing metropolitan, regional, national, and global economic conditions, including military base closures and outmigration, and how those conditions affect the community's economic base.
- How to create jobs for the workforce and how to provide people with access to those job opportunities by improving transportation infrastructure.

During Round I, designated communities had great success developing small businesses and creating jobs for residents.

Jackson County Rehabilitation Industries (JCRI) was originally a limited job-training program that trained workers for only light sewing and small manufacturing jobs. Today, thanks to funding from the Empowerment Zone, the Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation, JCRI offers a 4-month job-training program that serves as many as 50 people per session. Participants are trained in various skills applicable to area businesses. The program plans to establish a second workshop to serve nearby counties. In 1987 the EZ had a 23-percent unemployment rate. Today the unemployment rate is 5 percent.

In the Mid Delta, EZ in Mississippi, a \$2.5 million loan guarantee has enabled a catfish-processing business to open a new plant that will eventually create more than 400 jobs.

Economic Opportunity—Questions

Inside the Community.

- Do your community partners understand how EZ designation can offer a great opportunity for local businesses, jobs, and entrepreneurship to increase within the Zone and community?
- Do you have a plan for marketing the tax incentives inside and outside the community?
- Does your plan empower residents to take a real economic stake in the community?
- Will residents receive training, assistance, and family support to become economically self-sufficient?

Outside the Community.

- How will you create new jobs?
- How will the economic revitalization of the EZ be tied to the broader metropolitan and regional economies?
- Will residents be linked with employers and jobs throughout the entire region or metropolitan area?
- Have you consulted with your local port authority to make it aware of your proposal, and to discuss the potential of mutual economic development opportunities?
- Will your Strategic Plan ensure that jobs in the Zone are not created at the expense of jobs elsewhere?

Access to Capital.

- How will your Strategic Plan increase lending and investment opportunities within the Zone and community?
- Will there be a mechanism in the Plan to encourage community investment and to create new growth? Does your plan call for establishing or expanding community financial institutions, one-stop capital shops, or partnerships with other financial institutions?

Workforce Development.

- How will your Plan better train and develop the workforce in your community?
- How will it coordinate with welfare-to-work, school-to-work, and other job-training and job-placement initiatives?
- Have you identified potential transportation barriers to Zone residents' employment opportunities?

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable community development promotes the creation of livable and vibrant communities through comprehensive approaches that coordinate economic, physical, environmental, community, and human development. These approaches should preserve the environment and historic landmarks; address brownfields cleanup and redevelopment; explore the economic development advantages of energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy resources; and improve the quality of and/or access to healthcare and human services, education, childcare, affordable housing, transportation, and public safety.

Although job creation is a critical first step toward the creation of livable and vibrant communities, the ability to sustain that positive momentum depends on a coordinated and comprehensive strategy that creates an environment where human initiative, work, and families can flourish. Where the streets are safe, the air and water are clean, housing is affordable and secure, human services are accessible, and a vital civic spirit is nurtured, is a community that is a source of strength and hope for its residents. Sustainable community development promotes a comprehensive approach to revitalization through the coordination of economic, physical, environmental, community, and human resources.

Some factors to consider when developing your strategy for sustainable community development follow:

- Does your Strategic Plan accurately assess the needs of your community's residents?
- Does your Plan identify services that will actively reach your residents?
- Does your Plan effectively coordinate the delivery of existing services?
- Does your Plan create new programs to fill service gaps?
- Does your Plan create the most efficient means of linking residents to services?
- Does your Plan track the ongoing effectiveness of service delivery?
- Can your Plan factor in the possibility of natural disasters and include ways to handle them efficiently?

Round I designated communities have developed and executed several innovative projects to create sustainable economic development.

The Little Dixie Community Action Agency—Southeastern Oklahoma’s EC—has beaten back the area’s near 32-percent poverty rate with a community development program that emphasizes business development and training. The revolving business loan program, Self-Employment Entrepreneurial Development Systems (SEEDS), has funded 18 business startups and created 58 jobs, some of which have been filled by individuals who have moved from welfare to work. SEEDS loan recipients receive extensive training in preparing business plans, bookkeeping practices, tax requirements, marketing strategies, and other business-related subjects. SEEDS monitors loan recipients’ business operations to avoid any potential problems. There have been no loan defaults. This fresh approach to sustainable community development has spurred the growth of other business development and training programs in the Little Dixie EC. The Poor Man’s Bank, the Community Development Block Grant business loan, and the Intermediary Relending Program help finance or partially finance business ventures that require more capital than a small business loan can offer.

In the Central Savannah River Area, Georgia, EC, community organizers have helped to establish a human development center in each of the 10 census tracts. Local community residents determine specific needs at each center. Programs and services offered include youth leadership training, morning and evening general equivalency degree (GED) classes, Boy Scouts, and parenting skills training.

Sustainable Community Development—Questions

Consolidated Planning.

- How does your Strategic Plan fit into a larger development plan for the surrounding area that is consistent with broad regional development strategies?
- Does your Plan include transportation considerations? Pre-disaster planning, if appropriate?

Land Use, Infrastructure, Environment, and Transportation.

- How will your Plan foster a sustainable community development through projects such as open spaces, recreational areas, cultural institutions, transportation, land and water use, energy conservation, waste management, environmental protection, and the quality of life in the community?
- How will you identify contaminated brownfields sites for development?
- How will you market the Brownfields Tax Incentive to developers?

Public Safety.

- How could community policing be used to guarantee the basic safety and security of persons and property within the EZ?

Supporting Families.

- How will the strengths of families be supported in your Plan so that parents can succeed at work, provide nurturing homes, and contribute to the vitality of their community?

Youth Development.

- How will your Plan assist in the development of children and young adults into economically productive and socially responsible citizens?
- Will young people be provided opportunities to take responsibility for developing the skills, discipline, attitudes, and initiative to make work rewarding?

Housing.

- How will your Plan provide for housing construction and rehabilitation?
- Have you established a homeownership goal?
- How will you serve the homeless population?

Education.

- How will your Plan develop and coordinate with educational programs for youth and adults, including vocational and postsecondary education?
- Will you provide assistance to high school dropouts?

Health.

- What health-related programs will be developed?
- Will new facilities be opened or renovated?

Applied Technology.

- How will your Plan improve intra-community communications and access to information?
- Does your Plan include considerations for environmental improvements and energy conservation?

Questions About Nominations and Eligibility

What is a participating entity?

A participating entity may include any group, organization, regional planning agency, or government entity that participates in the development and implementation of a community's Strategic Plan.

What constitutes a local government?

A local government is any individual county, city, town, township, parish, village, or other general purpose political subdivision of a State or any combination thereof.

If an EZ includes geographic areas from more than one relevant local government, must all of them join in the nomination?

Yes. If a nominated area crosses the boundaries of State or local governments, then each State or local government must join in the nomination.

Can a portion of a census tract or portion of a block numbering area, which is equivalent to a census tract in rural locations, be included in a nominated area?

No. Census tracts and block numbering areas cannot be partially represented. However, Indian reservations may pose reservation boundaries instead of census tracts.

Can the same census tract be included in more than one nominated area?

No. Each nominated area must be an independent and unique area.

(Continued on next page)

THE APPLICATION PROCESS: BECOMING AN EZ

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATION: NOMINATION

To apply for EZ designation, an area must be nominated by a nominating entity: its State or local government, a tribal governing body, or a State-chartered economic development corporation (EDC). (If an EDC submits an application, it will be treated as a nomination by State and local governments.) The information requested in the *Rural Application Form* must be certified by the State and local governments. In the case of areas within Indian Nation reservations, the nominating entity should be the reservation governing body.

Although these entities must do the nominating, all parts of the community should participate in the application process by being involved in creating the community's Strategic Plan. Participants should be identified in all application materials. In areas where government staff is limited, one community participant may take the lead preparing the application. In larger areas, local governments may take the lead, bringing together the many diverse groups that need to be part of the process.

See the accompanying box for more information on nominations.

STEPS IN APPLYING

Step 1: Obtain Round II Application Materials

In addition to this *Guide*, these materials include:

Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones: Published in the *Federal Register* and available upon request.

Rule—Rural Empowerment Zones Round II: Published in the *Federal Register* and available upon request.

Rural Application Form: Nomination for designation as a rural Empowerment Zone (Parts I-IV). The *Application Form* identifies and contains the eligibility information a community must submit to USDA for Round II designation.

To help you prepare your Strategic Plan, the following publications are available:

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities: Leads communities through the process of establishing a vision, evaluating problems and opportunities, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and setting goals and strategies.

A Guide to Implementation and Benchmarking: Helps rural communities turn their Strategic Plans into specific work programs and create performance measures to evaluate their progress.

Federal Programs Guide: Provides a list of Federal Government programs available to distressed communities. Applicants can use this *Guide* to identify current or prospective Federal Government programs that may be helpful to revitalize their neighborhood.

Internal Revenue Service Publication 954, Tax Incentives for Empowerment Zones and Other Distressed Communities: Summary of the tax incentives available to EZs and other communities in distress.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Preliminary Guidelines: Round II EZ/EC SSBG Grants for Empowerment Zones: See Eligible Uses of EZ/EC SSBG Funds (page 35).

What Works! in the Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, Volume II: A compilation of successful projects from current EZs and ECs (includes contact names and telephone numbers).

For further information regarding Round II of the EZ/EC Initiative, or to order one of these publications, please call 1-800-851-3403.

Step 2: Submit a Notice of Intent To Participate

Part II of the *Rural Application Form* is the Notice of Intent To Participate. Refer to the *Rule* in the *Federal Register* to determine whether your nominated area is eligible for EZ designation. If you have determined that your area is eligible, submit the Notice of Intent To Participate to the appropriate address (given on the top of the form). Submission of this form ensures a place on our mailing list so we can provide you with updated information on

Does a nominated area have to be an existing State-designated enterprise zone?

No. However, if a State enterprise zone does participate, the State must still join in the nomination and provide appropriate support for the proposed Federal EZ activities.

How many nominations can be submitted by a nominating entity?

The nominating entity or entities may nominate any number of areas. However, no nominated area can contain a census tract that has been included in any other nominated area.

Can Round I ECs apply to become Round II EZs?

Yes, but they are still required to meet all the eligibility and nomination requirements, including the submission of a Strategic Plan.

Can EZs be established on Native American reservations?

Yes. Indian Nations would be eligible to be designated as EZs in Round II.

The Round II legislation allows up to one rural EZ to be designated in "emigration" areas. What does this mean?

One rural Zone will be designated in an area experiencing recent high population outmigration, whether or not it has high levels of poverty. Census tracts in counties that had population outmigration of 15 percent or higher between 1980 and 1994 are eligible for nomination as emigration areas. Although they are exempt from the poverty criteria, all other criteria—land area, population, and distress—still apply.

requirements. Submission of this Notice lets USDA know that a community is undertaking a strategic planning process for the purpose of applying for EZ status. This form is not sufficient for application. Failure to submit this form will not disqualify a community from consideration.

Rural applicants may submit the Notice of Intent To Participate form electronically using the online Notice of Intent To Participate available on the EZ/EC Web site (<http://www.ezec.gov/round2>). The form may also be faxed to 202-690-1395 or submitted either to any local USDA Rural Development Office or directly to USDA Rural Development, Office of Community Development, 300 Seventh Street SW., Suite 701, Washington, DC 20024. Questions should be directed to 1-800-851-3403.

Step 3: Attend A Regional Workshop

USDA has scheduled regional workshops to provide you with further information about applying for EZ designation. Although attendance is not mandatory, the workshops will provide useful information about how best to complete the application process.

The schedule of workshops is as follows:

April 17 Montgomery, AL
April 21 Greenville, MS
April 21 Stillwater, OK
April 23 Salina, KS
April 23 Pendleton, OR
April 23 Sioux Falls, SD
April 28 Rockford, IL
April 29 Bedford, NH
April 30 Lexington, KY
May 1 Bakersfield, CA
May 5 Durango, CO
May 7 Norfolk, VA
May 12 Amarillo, TX
May 13 Shreveport, LA

Step 4: Complete the *Rural Application Form*

The *Rural Application Form* contains the “Nomination for Designation as an Empowerment Zone” (Parts I–IV). Please complete these forms and obtain all required certifications.

Step 5: Develop Your Strategic Plan

By far the most important part of the application is your community’s Strategic Plan for revitalization. USDA has developed a *Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities* to assist you in developing your Strategic Plan. The *Guide* contains critical information regarding the type of plan you should submit. In addition, the elements to be included in the Strategic Plan are discussed in USDA’s *Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones*. Be certain that your Plan contains all of the elements required.

Step 6: Submit Your Application by the Deadline

All applications must be received by 5 p.m. EST on October 9, 1998.

Your final submission should include:

- Nomination Form (Parts I–IV) including required certifications—nomination for Federal EZ designation, eligibility information, certifications, and population data.
- A Strategic Plan.
- Maps. Attach a copy of the 1990 census map that shows the boundaries of the local government(s) listed in Part I: Nomination and the boundaries of the nominated area, including developable sites.

Make sure that all certifying signatures are original signatures.

The original application and two copies must be submitted. Each page of the submission, excluding the *Rural Application Form*, should be labeled with the name of the participating or nominating entity. In addition, the application should include the name and telephone number of a person who may be contacted to answer questions regarding your application.

The 5 new EZs will be designated by January 1, 1999.

EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

USDA will evaluate applications on the following factors:

- The potential effectiveness of the Strategic Plan and the extent to which it reflects the four key principles of the Community Empowerment Initiative: strategic vision for change, community-based partnerships, economic opportunity, and sustainable community development. Section 25.204 of the *Interim Rule for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities* describes these factors in detail.
- The strength of the assurances that the Strategic Plan will be implemented.
- The extent to which the Strategic Plan proposes activities that address the community's problems creatively and innovatively.
- The extent to which applicant areas consisting of more than one noncontiguous parcel are located close enough together to make up a cohesive community or regional entity.
- The degree of need for development within the nominated area.
- Diversity within and among the nominated areas.

Applicants can improve their chances of developing a successful application by ensuring that their Strategic Plans—and the processes by which they are prepared—reflect these criteria. The required organization for the Strategic Plan is explained in Section VII of the *Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones*. The format of the Strategic Plan is designed to highlight the topic areas that communities should give particular attention to in developing and presenting their Strategic Plans.



AFTER SELECTION

The following activities will follow your selection as an EZ:

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

Shortly after designation, rural EZs will enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with the appropriate State or tribal governing entity and USDA. This Memorandum outlines the partnership agreements between the two parties.

Note on EZ Social Services Block Grant Funds

The Clinton administration's fiscal year 1999 Budget, which was sent to Congress in early February, includes proposed funding for a second round of EZs. The Administration is seeking \$1.7 billion over the next 10 years to fund 20 new EZs. Fifteen of the new Zones will be urban, and five will carry rural designation. Under the President's proposal, the five rural EZs will each receive \$4 million a year for the 10-year period, totaling \$40 million for each Zone. Legislation that would enact the President's proposal was sent to Congress late in the first quarter of 1998, and the Administration is hopeful Congress will expeditiously approve funding for this proposal. For information pertaining to eligible uses of EZ SSBG funds, see Eligible Uses of EZ SSBG Funds.

LEARNING WHAT WORKS! PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The performance of EZs will be tracked to:

- Evaluate the progress of your Strategic Plan against your self-designed performance standards and make necessary mid-course corrections to help meet your goals.
- Monitor the implementation of your Plan and determine if the EZ designation should be continued.
- Identify problems so USDA and other Federal agencies can provide needed assistance.
- Measure the impact the EZ/EC Initiative has on your community so that we can continue learning from innovative community development efforts.

The performance of EZs will be tracked using two methods:

- EZ designees will be required to submit periodic reports to USDA's Office of Community Development (OCD). This activity will provide a progress report on the benchmarks established by your Strategic Plan. These periodic reports will also reflect any modifications to your Strategic Plan that you may have negotiated with USDA over the course of the implementation of the local

program, to take advantage of changing opportunities and circumstances.

- Using the originally approved Strategic Plan and the periodic benchmark reports to provide a baseline of information, OCD will commission periodic third-party evaluations of the program.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO EZs

Through the Community Empowerment Board (CEB), Federal agencies have promised dedicated resources for EZs within the following signature initiatives:

- Southwest Border Regional Initiative
- Delta Regional Initiative
- Rural Champion Communities
- National Centers of Excellence
- National Centers of Excellence: Tribal College Partnership
- Reinventing Government Initiative

SOUTHWEST BORDER REGIONAL INITIATIVE

In response to Vice President Gore's challenge to EZs and ECs asking that they adopt regional approaches to planning and problem solving, 19 EZs, ECs, and Champion Communities from the southwest border region formed the Southwest Border Regional Initiative.

Key Features

- The Initiative includes EZs, ECs, and Champion Communities from Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and the State of Washington (serving migrant workers).
- The goal is to foster sustainable approaches to rural development across the border region.
- The partnership has identified education, environment, health, infrastructure, trade, and welfare reforms as focal points.

DELTA REGIONAL INITIATIVE

A similar regional initiative is being started in the Lower Mississippi Delta. Modeled on the Southwest Border Regional Initiative, it includes EZs and ECs from 219 counties in 7 States. Delta Regional joins the Southern EZ/EC Forum and the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center in a cooperative agreement to develop a long-range Strategic Plan. Together, this organization will

implement the over 200 recommendations from the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission report.

Key Features

- The Initiative includes both rural and urban EZ/ECs from the States of Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.
- The planning and organizational capacity of the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center is linked with the implementation capacity of EZs and ECs.
- It facilitates cross-community collaboration.
- Signing of the Memorandum of Agreement is targeted for spring 1998.

RURAL CHAMPION COMMUNITIES

USDA has broken barriers to ensure sustainable capacity building in rural communities, promote regional cooperation and partnering, and provide nondesignated applicant communities with basic technical assistance.

More than 180 rural communities organized and completed the strategic planning process as part of their application for Round I EZ/EC designations. To ensure that their important work produced continuing benefits to these communities, USDA designated them as “Champion Communities” and is providing continuing assistance to them.

Key Features

- USDA Rural Development has funded more than \$100 million in development projects in Champion Communities since 1995.
- Other CEB agencies have targeted funds and other initiatives to Champion Communities.
- USDA Rural Development has sponsored conferences to train community leaders and to promote networking among communities.
- USDA provides targeted technical assistance to Champion Communities and gives them preference points in project-funding decisions.

NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

Local capacity building and economic development sustainability is being enhanced through a 2-year partnership among four rural colleges and USDA. The four colleges assist EZ/EC communities with Strategic Plan implementation through training programs and other sources of expertise.

Key Features

- Each school received \$100,000 in seed money from the Fund for Rural America.
- Each school received a Peace Corps fellow from Illinois State University.
- Participating schools have formed a national network to share information and expertise with other isolated rural communities.
- The objective of this initiative is to build a permanent relationship between college and the community it serves. This program will continue the capacity building and build rural development capabilities for the communities.

The colleges participating in the National Centers of Excellence initiative are:

- Heritage College, Toppenish, Washington
- Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, Mississippi
- Somerset Community College, Somerset, Kentucky
- University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas

NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE: TRIBAL COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP

A related initiative helps tribal communities develop empowerment programs through the technical assistance of Tribal Colleges. With assistance from USDA, the colleges are developing programs of training and community service to address the critical needs of the communities they serve. The initiative responds to President Clinton's Executive Order 13021, which directed Federal departments and agencies to integrate Native American Tribal Colleges into their programs.

Key Features

- Each school received \$50,000 in seed money from USDA for first year operations.
- Colleges participate in a national network to share information and expertise.
- The objective of this initiative is to strengthen capacity building relationships between the communities and the Tribal Colleges.

Tribal Colleges participating in this initiative are:

- Cankdeska Cikana (Little Hoop) Community College, Fort Totten, North Dakota
- Crownpoint Institute of Technology, Crownpoint, New Mexico
- Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, Montana
- Nebraska Indian Community College, Winnebago, Nebraska

REINVENTING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

This initiative, under the leadership of Vice President Gore, will renew the commitment of cooperation between the Federal, State, and local governments and the people they serve.

To accomplish this goal, USDA and the Community Empowerment Board (CEB) are committed to working with all communities undergoing the strategic planning process—even if they do not receive EZ designation. USDA and CEB will strive to overcome programmatic, regulatory, and statutory impediments to encourage more effective economic, human, physical, environmental, and community development activities.

The particular impediments that present major challenges under this initiative should be made clear to USDA and CEB in the Strategic Plan. In turn, USDA and CEB will focus its energies on overcoming those barriers. Assistance in identifying impediments is essential to this program, and should explain what you want us to examine in an addendum to your Strategic Plan.

You should not, however, base your entire Strategic Plan on receiving specific waivers or benefiting from particular changes to Federal statutes or regulations. Our ability to take action varies widely from program to program and in some cases may be constrained

by statutes. Nevertheless, we will make every effort to accommodate your needs and, where appropriate, we will work with you to seek statutory authority for broader flexibility of Federal programs. Your experience and cooperation are essential to reinventing the way we do business so that we can be responsive to your Strategic Plan.



ELIGIBLE USES OF EZ/EC SSBG FUNDS

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES PRELIMINARY GUIDELINES: ROUND II EZ/EC SSBG GRANTS FOR EMPOWERMENT ZONES

Background

This document includes general guidance about allowed uses of Round II EZ/EC Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds that may be made available for Round II Empowerment Zones (EZs). It is based on the assumption that Round II EZ/EC SSBG funding is subject to the same statutory restrictions as the Round I EZ/EC SSBG grants. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will issue further guidance regarding Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds soon after it is authorized to award the funds.

Awards to States

(a) HHS will award Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds to each State that nominated a designated Round II EZ. HHS will award the funds for each Round II EZ to the State agency that typically receives Social Services Block Grants, unless the EZ Lead Entity(ies) and its (their) State requests HHS to award them to a different agency.

(b) The HHS Terms and Conditions of the Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds will direct the recipient State agency to provide the funds to the appropriate Round II EZ Lead Entity(ies) for activities specified in the EZ's Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan. It is expected that the EZs will revise their Strategic Plans and benchmark documents/implementation plans from time to time.

Allowed Uses of Round II EZ/EC SSBG Funds

(a) Round II EZs may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds for a wide variety of programs, services, and activities directed at revitalizing distressed communities and promoting economic independence for residents. Allowed programs, services, and activities include, but are not limited to:

- Community and economic development programs and efforts to create employment opportunities.
- Job training and job readiness projects.

- Health programs such as public health education, primary healthcare, emergency medical services, alcohol and substance abuse prevention and treatment programs, and mental health services.
- Human development services such as child, youth, and family development programs, services for the elderly, and childcare services.
- Education projects such as after-school activities, adult learning classes, and school-to-work projects.
- Transportation services.
- Environmental cleanup programs.
- Policing and criminal justice projects such as community policing efforts and youth gang prevention programs.
- Housing programs.
- Projects providing training and technical assistance to the EZ Lead Entity(ies), its (their) board and committee members, and other organizations.
- Projects to finance community-focused financial institutions for enhancing the availability of credit such as loan funds, revolving loan funds, and microenterprise loan funds as well as other activities for easing financial barriers faced by social services entities, housing organizations, and other organizations serving EZ residents.

(b) Round II EZs may use the Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds for projects supported in part with other Federal, State, local, or private funds, and they may allocate a portion of the funds to the State grantee agency for its administrative and grant oversight costs. Round II EZs may not use the funds as the source of local matching funds required for other Federal grants.

(c) Round II EZs must ensure that each proposed use of Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds is directed at one or more of the EZ/EC SSBG statutory goals; included in the Strategic Plan; structured to benefit EZ residents; and in compliance with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws and regulations.

(d) EZ/EC SSBG Statutory Goals: The statutory goals for uses of EZ/EC SSBG funds are as follows:

- (1) Achieving and maintaining economic self-support for residents to help them develop and retain the ability to support themselves and their families economically.
- (2) Achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency for residents to enable them to become and remain able to care for themselves in daily activities and over the long term.

(3) Preventing neglect and abuse and preserving families; protecting children and adults who are unable to protect themselves from neglect, abuse, or exploitation; and preserving, rehabilitating, or reuniting families living in the designated neighborhoods.

(e) Strategic Plan: All programs, services, and activities financed in whole or in part with Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds must be included in the Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan. Each project description must indicate the EZ/EC SSBG statutory goal it is attempting to achieve and how it will benefit EZ residents.

(f) Resident Benefit: All programs, services, and activities financed in whole or in part with Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds must be structured to benefit EZ residents primarily; the programs, services, and activities may also benefit nonresidents.

(g) EZ/EC SSBG Statutory Program Options: To the extent consistent with the local strategic vision, localities may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds to finance programs, services, and activities for addressing any of the following broad statute-based program options. EZs that use the funds for any of the program options will have more flexibility in using the funds. [See paragraph (h) below.] The EZs are not required to use the funds for the program options, and may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds to finance programs, services, and activities addressing other issues. The program options are as follows:

(1) To provide residential or nonresidential drug and alcohol prevention and treatment programs that offer comprehensive services for residents, particularly for pregnant women and mothers and their children.

(2) To support:

(A) Training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged adults and youths in construction, rehabilitation, or improvement of affordable housing, public infrastructure, and community facilities.

(B) Nonprofit organizations such as community colleges and junior colleges providing short-term training courses about entrepreneurship and self-employment for disadvantaged adults and youth, and other types of training that will promote individual self-sufficiency and the interests of the community.

- (3) To support projects designed to promote and protect the interests of children and families outside of school hours, including keeping schools open during evenings and weekends for mentoring and study.
- (4) To support:
- (A) Services designed to promote community and economic development and job support services such as skills training, job counseling, transportation services, housing counseling, financial management, and business counseling.
 - (B) Emergency and transitional housing and shelters for families and individuals.
 - (C) Programs that promote homeownership, education, and other routes to economic independence for families and individuals.
- (h) To the extent a program, service, or activity in the Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan is a statutory program option listed in paragraph (g) above, the EZ may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds to implement that activity including to:
- (1) Purchase or improve land or facilities.
 - (2) Make cash payments to individuals for subsistence or room and board.
 - (3) Make wage payments to individuals as a social service.
 - (4) Make cash payments for medical care.
 - (5) Provide social services to institutionalized persons.
- (i) To the extent a program, service, or activity in the Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan is *not* a statutory program option listed in paragraph (g) above, the EZ may use Round II EZ/EC SSBG funds for the following purposes as a component of that activity only after receiving approval from HHS:
- (1) Purchase or improve land or facilities.
 - (2) Make cash payments to individuals for subsistence or room and board.
 - (3) Make wage payments to individuals as a social service.
 - (4) Make cash payments for medical care.
 - (5) Provide social services to institutionalized persons.
- (j) To the extent a program, service, or activity in the Strategic Plan and benchmark document/implementation plan is not one of the program options listed in paragraph (g) above, the Plan must include a statement explaining why the locality chose that project.

USDA CONTACTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

DAN GLICKMAN, SECRETARY

Office of Community Development

300 Seventh Street SW.

Reporters Building

Suite 701

Washington, DC 20024

Phone: 1-800-851-3403

Fax: 202-690-1395

E-mail: ocd@rurdev.usda.gov

Web site: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ocd>

Rural Economic Development Resources

Web site: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/>

Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities

Web site: <http://www.ezec.gov>

CONTACT LIST

EMPOWERMENT ZONES

KY, Kentucky Highlands

Jerry Rickett

P.O. Box 1738

London, KY 40744

Phone: 606-864-5175

Fax: 606-864-5194

E-mail: khicnet@skn.net

MS, Mid Delta

Harold Lathon

14000 Highway 82 West

Mississippi Valley State University

L.S. Rogers Building

Itta Bena, MS 38941

Phone: 601-254-9957

Fax: 601-254-9941

E-mail: middelta@www.ezec.gov

TX, Rio Grande Valley

Bonnie Gonzalez
301 South Texas
Mercedes, TX 78570
Phone: 956-514-4000
Fax: 956-514-4007
E-mail: riogrande@www.ezec.gov

ENTERPRISE COMMUNITIES

AL, Chambers County

David Shaw
1130 Quintard Avenue, Suite 300
Anniston, AL 36201
Phone: 205-237-6741
Fax: 205-237-6763
E-mail: eastal@www.ezec.gov

AL, Greene/Sumter Counties

John Zippert
County Road 2
P.O. Box 95
Epes, AL 35460
Phone: 205-652-9676
Fax: 205-652-9678
E-mail: greensum@www.ezec.gov

AR, East Central Arkansas

Marilyn Lynch
1000 Airport Road
Forrest City, AR 72335
Phone: 870-630-2005
Fax: 870-630-2035
E-mail: ecentar@www.ezec.gov

AR, Mississippi County

Sam Scruggs
205 South Second Street
Former Eaker Airforce Base
Blytheville, AR 72316
Phone: 870-532-2348
Fax: 870-532-2625
E-mail: areco@www.ezec.gov

AZ, Arizona Border Region

Joel Viers
118 Arizona Street
Bisbee, AZ 85603
Phone: 520-432-5301
Fax: 520-432-5858
E-mail: azec@www.ezec.gov

AZ, Arizona Department of Commerce

Pat Schroeder
3800 North Central, Suite 1500
Phoenix, AZ 85012
Phone: 602-280-1350
Fax: 602-280-1305

AZ, City of San Luis

Gail Gallagher
P.O. Box S
San Luis, AZ 85349
Phone: 520-627-2027
Fax: 520-627-3879

CA, Imperial County

Maria Matthews
836 Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243
Phone: 760-337-7814
Fax: 760-337-8907
E-mail: imperialco@www.ezec.gov

CA, City of Watsonville/County of Santa Cruz

Lisa Lampmann
215 Union Street, Second Floor
Watsonville, CA 95076
Phone: 408-763-4033
Fax: 408-761-0736
E-mail: watson@www.ezec.gov

FL, Jackson County

Leon Foster

P.O. Box 920

Marianna, FL 32447

Phone: 904-526-4005

Fax: 904-526-4008

E-mail: jacksonco@www.ezec.gov

GA, Central Savannah River Area

Grady Sampson

CSRA Regional Development Center

4729 Quaker Road, Suite C

P.O. Box 40

Keysville, GA 30816

Phone: 706-554-0342

Fax: 706-554-6626

E-mail: csra@www.ezec.gov

GA, Crisp/Dooly

Elton Shauf

115 13th Avenue West

P.O. Box 587

Cordele, GA 31010

Phone: 912-273-9111

Fax: 912-276-0450

E-mail: crispdooly@www.ezec.gov

LA, Macon Ridge

Chip Rogers

903 Louisiana Avenue

P.O. Drawer 746

Ferriday, LA 71334

Phone: 318-757-3033

Fax: 318-757-4212

E-mail: maconridge@www.ezec.gov

LA, Northeast Louisiana Delta

Moses Junior Williams

400 East Craig Street, Suite B

Tallulah, LA 71282

Phone: 318-574-0995

Fax: 318-574-3132

E-mail: tallulah@www.ezec.gov

MI, Lake County

Mary L. Trucks
302 North Main Street
P.O. Box 37
Scottville, MI 49454
Phone: 616-757-3785
Fax: 616-757-9669
E-mail: lakeco@www.ezec.gov

MO, City of East Prairie

Martha Ellen Black
Susanna Wesley Family Learning Center
207 North Washington Street
P.O. Box 249
East Prairie, MO 63845
Phone: 573-649-3731
Fax: 573-649-5028
E-mail: epec@1dd.net

MS, North Delta

Stuart Guernsey
P.O. Drawer 330
Sardis, MS 38666
Phone: 601-487-1968
Fax: 601-487-3595

NC, Halifax/Edgecombe/Wilson

Empowerment Alliance
Reuben Blackwell
P.O. Drawer 1180
Rocky Mount, NC 27802
Phone: 919-972-1609
Fax: 919-972-1232
E-mail: blackwell@Ci.rocky-mountain.nc.us

NC, Robeson County

Cynthia Johnson
Lumber River Council of Government
4721 Fayetteville Road
Lumberton, NC 28358
Phone: 910-618-0722
Fax: 910-618-5576
E-mail: robeson@www.ezec.gov

NM, La Jicarita

Ron Martinez
P.O. Box 546
Penasco, NM 87553
Phone: 1-800-458-7323
Fax: 505-587-1687
E-mail: lajicarita@www.ezec.gov

OH, Greater Portsmouth

Bob Walton
433 Third Street
P.O. Box 1523
Portsmouth, OH 45662
Phone: 614-354-7541
Fax: 614-354-3933
E-mail: bwalton@zoomnet.net

OK, Southeast Oklahoma

Bob Yandell
502 West Duke Street
Hugo, OK 74743
Phone: 405-326-6441
Fax: 405-326-6655
E-mail: ltlldixie@www.ezec.gov

OR, Josephine County

Katie Wetzel
Illinois Valley Community Response Team
P.O. Box 1824
Cave Junction, OR 97523
Phone: 541-592-2838
Fax: 541-592-4106
E-mail: josephine@www.ezec.gov

OR, Sunny-Wolf Community Response Team

Gary O'Neal
P.O. Box 127
Wolf Creek, OR 97497
Phone: 541-866-2600
Fax: 541-866-2449

PA, City of Lock Haven

Maria Boileau
20 East Church Street
Lock Haven, PA 17745
Phone: 717-893-5907
Fax: 717-893-5905
E-mail: entprise@oak.kcsd.k12.pa.us

SC, Williamsburg County/Lake City

Faith Rivers
P.O. Box 428
128 West Main Street
Kingstree, SC 29556
Phone: 803-354-9070
Fax: 803-354-3252
E-mail: wmsburg@www.ezec.gov

SD, Beadle/Spink

Lori Hintz
BASEA
P.O. Box 68
Yale, SD 57386
Phone: 605-599-2991
Fax: 605-599-2992
E-mail: basecec@basec.net

TN, Fayette County/Haywood County

John Sicola
157 Poplar, Room B150
Memphis, TN 38103
Phone: 901-576-4610
Fax: 901-576-3519
E-mail: fayhayco@www.ezec.gov

TN, Scott/McCreary Area

Leslie Winningham
P.O. Box 186
Huntsville, TN 37756
Phone: 423-663-2910
Fax: 423-663-4773
E-mail: scottco@www.ezec.gov

VA, Accomack-Northhampton

Arthur Carter

Economic Empowerment and Housing Corporation

P.O. Box 814

Nassawadox, VA 23413

Phone: 757-442-4509

Fax: 757-442-7530

E-mail: accomack@www.ezec.gov

WA, Lower Yakima County

Dan Guzman

P.O. Box 329

Sunnyside, WA 98944

Phone: 509-839-6847

Fax: 509-839-7462

E-mail: yakima@www.ezec.gov

WV, Central Appalachia

Terrell Ellis

P.O. Box 176

Clay, WV 25043

Phone: 304-587-2034

Fax: 304-587-2027

E-mail: caez@access.mountain.net

WV, McDowell County

Dr. Cliff Moore

P.O. Box 158

Wilcoe, WV 24895

Phone: 304-448-2118

Fax: 304-448-3287

E-mail: mcdowell@www.ezec.gov

AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS

Notice Inviting Applications for Designation of Rural Empowerment Zones: Published in the *Federal Register* and available upon request.

Rule—Rural Empowerment Zones Round II: Published in the *Federal Register* and available upon request.

Rural Application Guide: This *Guide* offers specific instructions on how rural communities should prepare their application for Empowerment Zone designation.

Rural Application Form: Nomination for designation as a rural Empowerment Zone (Parts I-IV). The *Application Form* identifies and contains the eligibility information a community must submit to USDA for Round II designation.

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities: Leads communities through the process of establishing a vision, evaluating problems and opportunities, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and setting goals and strategies.

A Guide to Implementation and Benchmarking: Helps rural communities turn their Strategic Plans into specific work programs and create performance measures to evaluate their progress.

Federal Programs Guide: Provides a list of Federal Government programs available to distressed communities. Applicants can use this *Guide* to identify current or prospective Federal Government programs that can be used to help revitalize their neighborhoods.

Internal Revenue Service Publication 954, Tax Incentives for Empowerment Zones and Other Distressed Communities: A guide to tax incentives available to designees of Round II.

What Works! in the Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, Volume II: A compilation of successful projects from current Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities (includes contact names and telephone numbers).

To request these publications, please call 1-800-851-3403.

OTHER RESOURCES

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

Two CD-ROMs that detail information on Federal procurements valued at more than \$25,000 for an entire fiscal year, the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* and the Census Bureau's *Federal Assistance Award Data Systems* are available. This information helps to identify who buys what, who gives grants and loans, and who gets Federal funding.

Program/Agency Contact:

Governmentwide Information Systems Division

U.S. General Services Administration

Phone: 202-708-5126

Web site: <http://www.gsa.gov>

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U.S. Department of Agriculture
Dan Glickman, Secretary

Rural Development
Jill Long Thompson, Under Secretary